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ENG 2009G-004: Literature and human values: Faith, progress, survival, hope

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English 2009 Literature and Human Values—Faith, Progress, Survival, Hope Spring
2005

Stephen Swords

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Office Hours: Tuesday—9:30-11, 1-2; Thursday—8:30-9:30, 1-2, and by appointment

Books for the Course

Dorothy Allison, **Bastard Out Of Carolina**

Willa Cather, **Song of the Lark**

Neil Gaiman, **American Gods**

Jack Kerouac, **On the Road**

Toni Morrison, **Song of Solomon**

Arundati Roy, **God of Small Things**

Art Spiegelman, **Maus I, Maus II**

Graham Swift, **Waterland**

A movie or two

Course Agenda

The real purpose of this course is to get you to read some good books from first page to last and to explore as a group why reading creative literature is worth one's time. It is understood that this may be a new experience for some members of the class, while old hat for others, but my hope for this course overall is that by the end, you will have found some books and movies you like, some discussions that proved interesting, and some directions you might go in the future.

The subtitle for this class—"Faith, Progress, Survival, Hope"—lays out a set of themes for us to be looking for as we take on these books and films. It seems to me that we live in a time (perhaps every time feels this way) when all four of those words are wide open to definition and radically under question. What does it mean to have faith? Is there one faith everybody ought to have? Are we making progress? Toward what? Will we get there, wherever that is? What about survival, what with global warming, American and Islamic terrorism, and so forth? Are there any grounds for sustaining hope? What should we hope for, anyway? Perhaps answers to questions like these lie in the stories we'll read or see, or perhaps not, given that most artists are not exactly ministers or propagandists or politicians, or even teachers. But they do have things to say, and in this class we will try to listen.

Course expectations

1. Read the material. There will be quizzes, and they will count.
2. Come to class. Missing a class or two will not hurt you. Missing more than that will.
3. Talk in class. If you don't volunteer, I will point. Participants get good grades; non-participants don't.
4. Do the writing. There will be a take home mid-term and final, along with some in class writing, perhaps.